

Women in Portuguese Advertising

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at identifying if advertising in Portugal shows any kind of gender discrimination. Using Bem's perspective (1974) we also studied the way in which male and female stereotypes are conveyed in order to understand the roles men and women undertake in advertising.

As an initial hypothesis we look at the dominant ideology in advertising, in order to understand if this is still a male dominated society, or if another logic prevails.

The study results from a research to advertising in Portuguese national media, open signal televisions, radio, written press, Internet and outdoors.

INTRODUCTION

Women's role in society has been inferior to men. This inferior condition is imposed by men, as man has, since the beginning of times, taken advantage of his physical strength to divide labour based on gender premises: men undertake the tasks that demand physical strength and are conducted outside the house, and women were remitted to domestic tasks even if these tasks require larger effort.

To question this ideology has been one of the main quests of social movements in Portugal and in the world. Advertisement, as part of the media, must also be sensitive to such matters.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Advertisement, as a mass media tool, conveys dominant ideologies, being a reflex of society's gender stereotypes.

Historically the sexual exploitation of women's body by advertisement became evident in the 40s and 50s of the 20th century. Sexual exploitation because the woman was shown in the printed image and later on television with a garment that underlined her silhouette or in a seductive pose.

In the two following decades, due to the flourishing of household products, namely hygiene products and appliances and the campaigns designed to promote them, the women that posed for the advertisement photographs continued to be thin and elegant, but became more romantic and absorbed in their own thoughts. They were active, although they were shown with a reserved and timid demeanour when acting as a mom, newly wed housewife or engaged young woman, in enactments that reproduce the stereotype of a submissive not a sexual woman. As Amalou jests, «in the 70s, women shown in advertisement are “unemployed”, “ignorant”, “fragile” and “live in the expectation of good advice” (2001, p. 24).

Nowadays, and despite remarkable evolution in the woman's role in society, it is still possible to interpret some enactments in advertisement as implicitly showing dialectics between sexes, meaning that some ads show us images where the social, professional and cultural role of women is as important as men, but in other ads the stereotypes connected to women, in particular, female submission, are still present.

Method

Object of analysis

The advertisement under analysis was based on television ads, written press, outdoors and Internet. Radio was excluded from the research, as the analysis of the characters would be very complex due to the lack of image.

In the time frame to which we refer – 3rd trimester of 2005, (from 1 July to 30 September) – 220 different ads were analysed, from a universe of 675. The number of ads that were analysed is less than the ones viewed due to repetition.

Instruments

Our analysis began with the characterisation of the ad, which comprises the typology of the characters, the space where the action takes place and the type of speech. Afterwards we set out to know the characteristics of the messages' content, the appeals, the values conveyed and the gender representations in advertisement.

In order to achieve this last goal, we resorted to a study coordinated by Brigitte Grésy (2002), *L'image des femmes dans la publicité*, from which the grid "Typologie des images de la femme dans la publicité" was adapted.

RESULTS

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Characters in advertising: their characterisation.

Messages in which women were portrayed as the main character were chosen in order to obtain the largest number possible of ads to analyse gender relations together with the men depicted.

In the ads analysed the female characters appeared more than male characters. They were mostly urban, of the A/B and C1 social classes, with an average age of 30. We also observed that the women were mostly 30 years old, while men were mostly in their 20s.

If the typology of the character that is in representation of the user is the most common for large consumption products, for products of great implication, the role of the influencer can be an alternative.

The results reveal that the role of user is the most used, present in 56,4% of the messages, followed by the role of the influencer in 40,0% of the cases. The role of the user and the influencer is equally distributed between sexes when they portray the main character, without any gender discrimination.

Contents of ads

In the analysed ads the activities are very varied, but the activities connected to seduction and leisure are the majority. Researching differences between the activities by character gender we found large differences. Therefore, men were more dominant in leisure activities (59,1%) than women (22,7%). On the other hand women (70,4%) were statistically more represented in seductive poses (significant qui-quadrado, 45,11 e significance, 0,006).

There are also more women in the personal care ads (83,3%) than men (16,7%). Lastly, there are more women (70,0%) in ads relating to household activities than men (10,0%). In the remaining activities, the gender presence was balanced.

This data suggests that there are different profiles for men and women in the role they play in advertisement.

The scenarios normally represent day-to-day situations (70,6%).

In the enactment by gender there are some differences, when we observe that men appear in a slightly larger number in these scenarios.

In the remaining scenarios men and women are positioned in different scenarios. Women (75,0%) appear more in seductive scenarios than men (4,2%), which is socially and culturally natural. Men appear more in bizarre and mysterious scenarios (61,1%) than women (22,2%) and slightly more in nature scenarios (46,7% against 33,3%).

Discriminative and aggressive features in the messages

According to the study *L'image des femmes dans la publicité*, (Gresy, 2002) seven images with discriminative images portraying women were found. This discrimination occurred when the main character was male (the woman was in a supporting role). Only 1 message directed at the female public portrayed a discriminative image of a woman. Men are discriminated in 5 images, 3 of which with content directed to men and 2 in ads with content directed to women. **(Erro! A origem da referência não foi encontrada.**

We also looked at the exploitation of the human body in advertisement. We found 23 messages (10,5%), in which the body was exploited in advertisement, and it was predominantly the woman's (in 78,3% of the times) body that was exploited in an erotic/ sexy way (69,6% - 16 images). In 7 of these images (30,4%) there was the suggestion of implicit sexual practices, **Erro! A origem da referência não foi encontrada.**

In this context of exploitation of the human body, the research shows that when the main character is a woman there is a larger erotic and sexual "exploitation" of the body than when the main character is a man. This occurs almost always with just one of the characters. In what concerns the suggestion of sexual practices we noted that in the majority of cases the male character makes the suggestion.

Finally we tried to identify situations of equality and inequality between genders, i.e., if there is "a sexual hierarchy or not". In 57 messages (25,9%) the two genders were presented in the same way. We understand that the application of this resource is done in order to create positive simulations of the consumer in the images of the models/actors that appear in the ad and with which they unconsciously want to identify.

In 15 (6,8%) messages we found stereotyped behaviours by gender. Thus the emphasis is on the female stereotype of the housewife that is taking care of the home, cooking and doing laundry in 93,0% of the times, while the man only has one stereotype attributed – drinking (7% of the times).

Conclusion

The male character is portrayed as outdoorsy and social, while the female is used for individual purposes based on the quality of the product and trust.

We can say that we found two gender stereotypes in advertising – one for the male characters and another for the female characters, in which some are framed in Bem's scale (1974). If we consider that these stereotypes are a form of discriminations then the Portuguese advertisement reproduces the Portuguese society, with men dominating the outdoor and social domains.

In what concerns objective elements of discrimination in the messages, the images we found were residual. However, it is mostly woman who are discriminated.

Thus, the situations of discrimination remit women to the role of “object”, and in some cases the female body was shown in erotic and sexual manners.

Lastly we tried to identify gender-stereotyped behaviour. Thus, in the analysed ads there are enactments that remit to the female stereotype, in which women are portrayed as housewives that take care of their home, cook and do laundry.

TABLES

Table 1 -. A discrimination

		Character Discriminative			Total
		Man	Woman	Both	
Gander of principal character in ads image	Male	3	7	1	11
	Female	2	1	0	3
	Both	2	1	0	3
Total		7	9	1	17

Table 2 - Aggressively

		Exploited body in an erotic/ sexy way	suggestion of implicit sexual practices	Total
Gander of principal character in ads image	Male	5	4	9
	Female	10	2	12
	Both	1	1	2
Total		16	7	23

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